

VINYL RE-ISSUES EXPOSED | CHEESY RAP

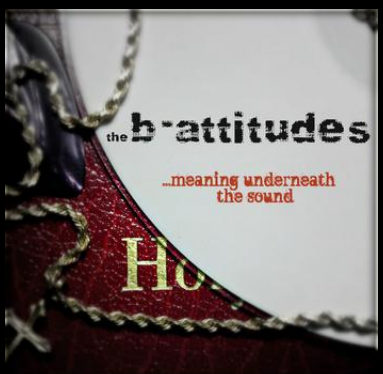
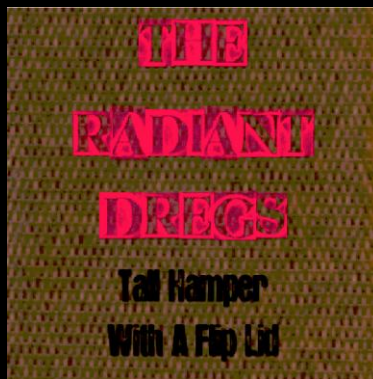
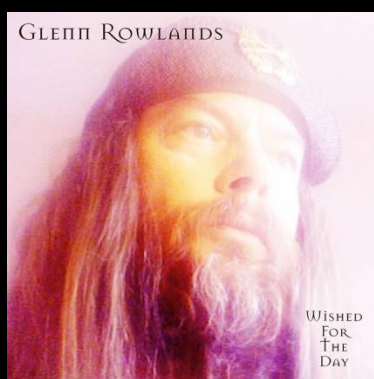
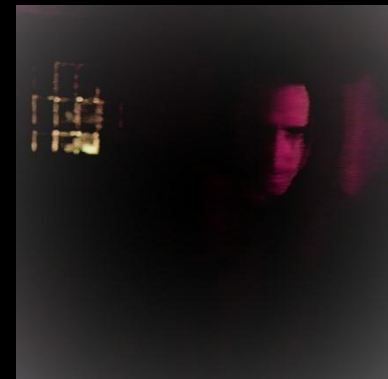
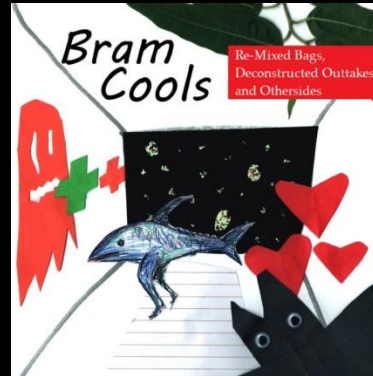
PARALLEL LOVE:

MATT HILTON & LUXURY



DOWN THE LINE

ISSUE 23 - DECEMBER 2019



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NEWS

see downdhelinezine.com for these stories and more:

Pre-Order "Two Ghosts" by Wayne Everett

Strung Gurus Release "Chelsea's Chasin' Dragons" Ep

New Christmas Music from Grave Robber and Rottweiler Records

New Christmas Tunes From Lee Bozeman and Golf Slang

Roxx Records Releases The Lead's "Burn This Record + 30"

The Blamed Release New Christmas EP

Bram Cools Releasing New Music

Pre-Order The Huntington's New Album "¡Muerto, Carcel, O Rocanrol!"

Steadfast Records Re-Releases "At Eternity's Gate" by Focused

Spoken in Tongues (Billy Power + Chris Wible) Release New Album

Klank Releases "Metal Health – An Instrumental Musical Journey"

The Wrong Mind Releases "All That We Consume"

Mini Mendez Releases "For Those Of You That Thought You'd Be Forgotten"

MAP Releases "Writer's Block, Pt. 2" EP

L.S. Underground's "Wakin' Up the Dead" Reissued by Retroactive Records

Chris Taylor Releases New Album "Lovers, Thieves, Fools + Pretenders"

Secret Archives of the Vatican Releases "Khorasan" EP

The Co-Op Communique Volume Five is Out Now!

2Minute Minor – Snake That Ate Its Own Tail

Mike Indest Releases "4 Track Diaries"

Retroactive Records Re-Issues "Hope" and "Flowers in the Rain" by Mad at the World



DOWN THE LINE PODCAST

If you haven't been keeping up with the [Down the Line Podcast](#), here are some of the recent episodes you missed:

Episode 20

Down the Line Podcast host Mike Indest talks with Brian Godawa about his new novel, *Jezebel*.

Episode 19

Mike interviews Ben from Everyone Belongs / Fight For Together. Ben has a keen ability to be able to identify and explain religious terms and practices looking past the superficiality of the words and suss out what is actually being conveyed.

Episode 18

Mike chats with Bob Kuhn about his experience having the “check all the boxes,” before he was allowed to minister in certain churches. We talk about the pros and cons of having to sign off on certain belief systems and trying to be honest with your questions and doubts.

Episode 17

Mike and Matt Crosslin finish their conversation about the 1992 release *The Grape Prophet* by L.S. Underground, and how it relates to what is happening in Christianity today.



LUXURY

...And The Band Plays On (A Matt Hinton Interview)

Interview by Doug Peterson

If you're familiar with Luxury, you've most likely heard them described as Morrissey backed by Fugazi, which is a cool description. After watching the new documentary, *Parallel Love: The Story of a Band Called Luxury*, I would go as far as describing Luxury as experiencing Vincent Van Gogh's *Starry Night* in the bellows of a mosh pit. They are just that good.

Here is my confession. I did not know much about Luxury prior to hearing their *Trophies* album. I had their CDs and was aware they were wildly creative while not writing for a Christian audience (even though Tooth & Nail was their label in formative years). I also knew three of the members became Orthodox priests following their awful wreck after Cornerstone '95. The film left me spellbound. I felt I had re-discovered a band I could connect with on a deep level, only many years late to the party.

Matt Hinton, the second guitarist of Luxury, is responsible for creating *Parallel Love*. Matt has been present at select film screenings, offering a Q&A following the film. I attended the Vancouver showing, and later joined Matt and five others at a nearby pub to chat and eat. About a month later, Matt was gracious enough to let me pick his brain further.

You've been touring various cities in the US/Canada in promotion of your *Parallel Love* film. How did that tour come about and how has it been going?

I would say it's not as much a tour as it's been occasions that I've been able to intercept the film, either because it was convenient or because that was part of the request of the cinema. For example, in Portland and Seattle, that that was a request of each of those cinemas. While I was in the Pacific Northwest, I asked my distributor to make sure there was something else to make it worth my while. So that was how Vancouver came about. Some of them have been week-long runs. Some have been one-off kind of nights in art house cinemas. The way that all came about is we got a theatrical distribution deal with Abramorama, who are distributors of lots of really cool music-related stuff, but not all music-related. And a lot of documentaries, but not all documentaries. They did the *Anvil* documentary from ten to fifteen years ago. They also did *Exit Through The Gift Shop*, which is a Banksy documentary. They did Ron Howard's Beatles documentary from two years ago.

Have there been any highlights or lowlights while taking the film out on the road?

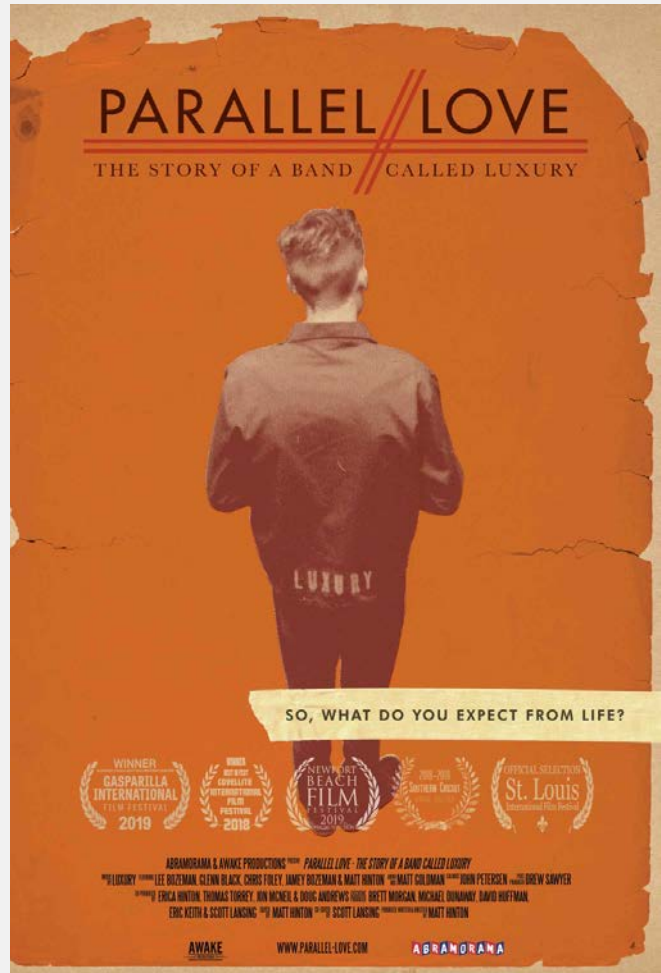
It's been almost all highlights. I would say that the screening you were at (Vancouver) was only a lowlight because it was a smaller turn-out. In other respects, Vancouver wound up being a ton of fun, like going out with you and the other folks for dinner after. To me, that was great. It's all been great.

People who have seen the movie seem to like it. One way you can tell is that whenever we've done the Q&A, the only thing that shuts down the Q&A is the venue. It's never because people have run out of questions to ask. They usually run about 30 to 40 minutes, which is a really long Q&A. So everyone has been really engaged and had interesting things to talk about.

Yeah, I found the Q & A time riveting. My attention was there because I was just so curious.

That is the one thing I have found about the response to the film. I used to be a teacher so my instinct as a teacher was to answer every question. Part of the art of making a documentary is to leave people with enough questions afterwards so we can have a good conversation. There were things that I would have liked to explain in the film, but it would have made the film too long. Plus, I've found that ambiguity exists in parts of the film, and I've enjoyed that.

I think you've done a really good job of leaving things open to interpretation and curiosity. I recall years ago there was some funding campaign for *Parallel Love*. Are



there any plans for releasing *Parallel Love* to a wider public, like a DVD or Netflix-type release?

I certainly hope so. The distributor is working on that, especially on the streaming side. The next phase of my interest in this is some sort of international release, particularly in Europe. Let's face it, Greece and Russia are two predominantly Orthodox nations. I can't think why it wouldn't work there. As well as Netflix or Amazon or one of those streaming platforms for sure.

When did you join Luxury and how did that come about?

I joined the band in '99. I'd been buddies with them prior to that: The band I was in previous to Luxury was a band called Piltown Man. Those two bands would play shows together. When one band booked a gig, say three months in advance, and somebody in the band wasn't able to swing it, the one band would hand that booking over to the other band. Now if *that* band couldn't do it, then we would conspire to create a third band called Metropolitan. Metropolitan was a band that was made up of a different grouping of the two bands. It usually involved songs by each band, and a smattering of cover songs as well. There were really only three Metropolitan shows as I recall. I remember the first Metropolitan show included Luxury and Piltown

Man songs, but also had one or two Big Star songs, maybe a T. Rex song. And we were tight. The singer from Luxury (Lee) and I were roommates for a while in Atlanta. As soon as our bands got to know each other, we became close really quickly. We had a lot in common with our outlook and so forth. Anyway, there was sort of a point where the Luxury albums got a little more involved or interesting in terms of production. It became clear that you needed two, if not three, guitarists for playing live if you wanted to pull it off. Lee was interested in the performance piece of it. The idea was that I would take over Lee's (guitar) parts live. So I came on as a member of the band in '98 or '99. Given our history, I was kind of the obvious person to join.

Cool. You also have an award-winning film on Sacred Harp singing called *Awake, My Soul*. How did you find your passion in Sacred Harp and what is your current involvement in that?

I grew up listening to the music that my parents were listening to. It was a strict diet of bluegrass and old time country music, pre-Nashville type stuff, more along the lines of ballads. When I was about eight years old, I turned my back on it, thought it was dumb, and listened to Casey Kasem's Top 40 type stuff instead. Eventually, by the time I was in high school, I started to come back around to the music I was raised with. When I was fifteen or so, I went to a concert that was put on by a North Carolina ballad singer named Betty Smith. There was a flyer posted by the Atlanta Area Friends of Folk Music. One of

the things on that flyer was an announcement about a Sacred Harp singing coming up. To this day, I don't remember what seemed interesting to me about that. I went to that, which was an all-day singing. My instinct at the time was that it sounded like what would have happened if medieval Gregorian chant and early Renaissance music had happened in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains instead of Europe. It was all a part of that kind of music exploration for me. I started going to Sacred Harp singings on and off throughout the 90s. It was 1998, shortly before I joined Luxury, that my wife and I began working on the Sacred Harp film, though we didn't finish it until 2007 or 2008. By that time we had become Sacred Harp singers. Now, my family and I are at Sacred Harp singings as much as 30 or 40 times a year, these all day singings taking place on Saturdays and Sundays, usually in country churches scattered around Georgia and Alabama. Since we made the film it has now found its way around the country even in Vancouver, Portland, and Seattle, as well as internationally, to Germany, Poland, Ireland, Australia and so on. We're still super active in that community.

Is there any correlation between the Sacred Harp community and being a member of Luxury?

No.

I recall there is a song on BandCamp called "Restoration, 312b"....



Well, ok...hold on..."Restoration"...yeah, when we made that (Sacred Harp) film, we also made a soundtrack, which was a two disc set. The first disc was traditional Sacred Harp singing. The second disc was a various artists' compilation of contemporary artists doing their arrangements of Sacred Harp songs. For that collection, I convinced Lee (Bozeman) to record a song. I totally forgot about this, but the first song he set his mind to was "Restoration" which is on the bottom of page 312 in The Sacred Harp hymnal. I haven't heard it in ten years. It's on BandCamp from what you are telling me. Then I think I pushed Lee to attempt a song called "China," which is on page 163 on the bottom of the Sacred Harp. That was what wound up on the record. So that's the sole connection. Also, Chris (Foley) and I both played on the song that made it on the record. It was almost a Luxury song. It was an All Things Bright and Beautiful track.

This Sacred Harp disc set you are talking about, how can one get a hold of it?

We are going to re-release it, possibly before the end of 2019. The film is called *Awake, My Soul*. The soundtrack, with various artists, is called *Help Me to Sing*.

Parallel Love referenced how Luxury members were injured in the van accident after Cornerstone Festival. The film shows how they contemplated their own mortality during that time. They found some strength in humor and personal connections through that time. I'm wondering if there might be a connection in that event and the three members later becoming Orthodox priests. What are your thoughts on that?

Yeah. I think Jamey (Bozeman) is the most clear about the idea that he did not think he would have become Orthodox, much less a priest, having not been through that event. It serves as a sobering event in his life. If you were to ask him if had to do it over again, and he was in charge of it, would he have had the wreck happen. And his answer is yes, that more good came out of that event than evil. If you ask Lee that, it would be NO (laughter). He thought it was awful. Of course, Lee was injured way worse than anyone else. Whereas, because it's a movie, and you tell stories in a way that move from one thing to the next, the movie does not very clearly reveal the fact that Chris and Lee were both moving in that direction before the wreck.

They had both converted to Orthodoxy at that point. They were miles away from being priests, of course. But at that point they were Orthodox, and had that theological resource to fall back on, and that community to be bolstered by at that point. It was not as totally out of left field as it might have seemed. Also, Luxury, as individuals, was always serious about our faith. It's sort of interesting in so far as Luxury had as much relationship with regular bands as with Christian bands. It seemed to me, even more so looking back, that Luxury was far more serious about that kind of stuff than the so-called Christian bands really were, in my estimation. Now, talking to some of those bands who have abandoned the Christian

faith... when I've talked to some of them, and asked about why they abandoned it... I remember talking to this one guy who said, "You know, I just can't believe in some old man with a white beard, sitting on a throne in the clouds anymore." I was like, "What?! I don't know if you're kidding or what. No one believes that! What are you talking about?" So it leads to my theory of how those bands wound up being formed and what ended up happening, which was terrible for them and everyone around them. In Evangelical circles you got youth group culture.

What may take place is you have some kid who shares some proficiency on playing guitar. He's learned a few chords. So you have a youth minister, who innocently wants to encourage that kid. If the kid's been playing Black Sabbath riffs or something, the youth minister would be like, "Let's focus the talents over here. Why don't you play these worship songs for youth group on Wednesday nights?" The next thing you know, the kid has found himself in this world when he's thirteen years old, all he cares about is if girls are looking at him when He's playing, or he cares about the riffs and his new pedal. I'm reminded of a student I used to have. She was a girl raised in that sort of context. She sort of disapprovingly said, "Any boy who can play three chords and thinks he's my spiritual leader..." There was something to that. That was not the experience of the members of Luxury.

From a very early point, we personally would take theology and all the other stuff we were studying in college very seriously. I was a philosophy and religious studies major, and went on to grad school in that area. This was all stuff we were talking about. But it didn't slip in any direct way into the lyrics, especially in the early days. The lyrics were a different ball of wax.

This leads to my next question. When we went for food after the Q&A on the film in Vancouver, I overheard you talking about someone asking Lee whether Luxury was a Christian band. And Lee responded that Luxury is the *Only* Christian band. Do I have that right? What's the context behind that?

(Laughter) I didn't even want to talk about it because it annoyed me so much that it came up at that time. The reason I even brought it up (at the table) was that this person (sitting across from me) wanted to write an article with the title, something like "Luxury: The Only Christian Band." So for me, it was like, "HUH?!? How did you possibly have that instinct to think that?!" My contention throughout the film is that Luxury is not a Christian band at all. It was obvious, especially in the beginning, from the lyrics that Luxury wasn't a Christian band. Put it this way. You would find nothing as explicit as what you would find with Led Zeppelin, which nobody thinks is a Christian band. But "meet me Jesus in the middle of the air," as sung by Robert Plant on "In My Time of Dying," is vastly more explicit as a statement of some kind of faith. That is a traditional text, so I don't know we can assume Robert Plant was necessarily singing that in a confessional way, of course.

But certainly, if your lyrics are less explicitly Christian than Led Zeppelin's, then maybe you're not a Christian band. I don't know if that's the general rule we want to have, but maybe that's some kind of rule.

... Ok, so what did Lee mean? We were interviewed on this long-form interview show on public radio in Georgia. In the film I go to great pains to point out that one of the reasons the band really never took off was signing themselves to a Christian label, which was a terrible fit because they weren't a Christian band. So with any of the press that's gone alongside the film, I've been very hesitant to broach that subject with any press releases, even interviews. I didn't want to talk about it because any interview in general is likely to be peoples' introduction to the film and the idea of the band. Especially on public radio, it's a total deal breaker for most people, myself included. In general I am not interested in Christian rock music. So if I heard about a documentary on a Christian band I was not familiar with, that's just a non-starter for me. I can imagine even more so with ninety percent of the world. So in that context, it was an hour long show and we ended up talking an hour and a half so a good bit needed to be cut. That bit of Lee saying that Luxury is the Only Christian band never aired, thankfully.

The Luxury lyrics...there was a poetic-ness to them. But there was also a lot of critique.

Yeah, there are places you can find glimpses and glimmers of faith coming through. But there is easily as much critique of Christendom or that kind of thing. The lyrics, "...well-read Christian will be double-crossed whores." That would be a tough one for many Christian bookstores to swallow.

I think that song is called "When Those That Are Not Do Become Those That Are." Do you think that is describing the freak show amongst Christendom?

I think that's part of it, the general gospel truth, that the way is down, and those that are high will be brought low, and the low will be raised up. That is a case where, though it has that particular line, there are others that are provocative and contain theological truths. It actually does not take that much effort to discover but it's ensconced in language that is more rough around the edges. I don't want to presume to interpret Lee's lyrics for him.

On *Trophies*, there's the song "Don't Feel Bad If You Don't Feel Better Right Away." There are the lines "In the classroom, I sat and watched you, Never underlined a word, Funny unbelievers." I'm trying to flesh out why Lee is depicting unbelievers that way. Can you enlighten me?

Well, there's the other line on the album that says "unbelievers are strange."

Yeah, "...I loved a few, I remember their names..."

I would say it's another case of provocation on Lee's part. I don't know how he would put it in theological terms. I come from a Reformed tradition where I would say faith is a gift we are given more than a thing that we do. You're a believer or you aren't. I think that one song ("Don't Feel Bad If You Don't Feel Better Right Away") is talking about an unbeliever who is in seminary. The context is actually seminary as I recall. It kind of puts it, "Why are you even there? What are you up to? What's the point?" But also in terms of "unbelievers are strange..." Lee sees a cultural tendency for people of faith being excluded in a way, or not being understood. If you look at almost any portrayal of a Christian, certainly in a Hollywood film, nine times out of ten, they will be either very strange or very evil. I think Lee is turning that on its head. It's like he's saying, "*I* think unbelievers are strange." That's the more peculiar position, historically. The default setting of the human heart is belief, not skepticism. Unbelievers are the peculiar ones.

Are there any Luxury songs that have special meaning for you?

Yeah, for different reasons. A song may be essentially meaningful to a person because of something they were going through at the time, or reminds them of a time period. The songs on the first record put me in mind of that period. "Solid Gold," for example, Lee wrote for his wife when they were getting married. And it's a marriage song. I always liked that one a lot. We got Lee to perform that song at my wedding. That is a song that I think of. "To You Who Gave Me Hope and Were My Light" on the third record, I like quite a lot.

Does Luxury have any plans for future recordings?

Nothing is settled. But in the past couple weeks, we've been talking about it in more detail. At this point I'd be shocked if we didn't try to do something in the next year. Basically, Lee has about ten songs written that are eligible for the new record and that we have played together.

Some *Parallel Love* and *Luxury* videos to check out:

[Parallel Love film trailer](#)

[Luxury – "Parallel Love" lyric video](#)

[Luxury live in 1997](#)

[Luxury live in 2002](#)

[Lee Bozeman live 2012](#)



THE VINYL RE-ISSUE INDUSTRY EXPOSED!

by Matt Crosslin

Unless you live under a rock (and no judgment if you do), you have probably noticed there are more and more albums being re-issued on vinyl these days. The trend that looked like a fad a few years ago has grown into a full-fledged *thing*. And now that is a thing, many are noticing it has become an *expensive* thing. Accusations of price gouging, ripping off artists, and flooding the market are all on the rise. So we thought we would dig into just exactly what is going on here. It is time to go behind the scenes and expose just what is going on with these high-priced re-issues once and for all.

So first things first, we have to acknowledge that a vinyl record is a living relic of the past. In today's world of digitally exact precision and replication, it's hard to imagine a time when things weren't so... cookie-cutter. When the CD came along, it gave us an exact time limit of what could fit on each disc, no matter what type of music you put on it. Soft whispering music to loud death metal all took up the same space on a disc, even if there was a lot more sound on one when compared to the other. And the sound quality was set once the disc was burned - the 0's and 1's that make up the sound coming from CDs stay the same no matter what color or material you make the disc from. You could fix things somewhat with better equipment and equalizers, but there was nothing that could change what was put on the disc itself.

However, this level of precision was not previously a thing with vinyl. Louder music takes up more space in the plastic grooves, meaning you could fit more acoustic folk on side 1 than you could a blaring orchestral score. The louder the music means the less you can put on a side, which increases the width of the groove, thereby decreasing the quality of the music if you try to put more on there. Weird, I know. Making the disc out of thicker plastic improves the sound of the music even after you have finalized the mix in the studio. Before CDs came along, determining what your music would sound like before you picked out how much you would spend on the end materials was difficult at best. Today you can look up the price per unit for CD manufacturing, multiply it by the number of copies you want, and be done with it.

But vinyl? Not so fast.

First, you have to see if your music will fit on both sides of single disc. Oh, and will that be a 7-inch, a 10-inch, or a 12-inch disc? It's kind of a sliding scale: the more music you put on a side, combined with the amount of it that is loud

and noisy instead of soft and quiet, will decrease the quality to some degree. Will you need one disc of what size, or two? You can see how the prices can vary greatly already.

"But I know all of that" you say, "because you can still look all of this up online. I can see where a certain disc costs \$20 per disc and these labels are charging a lot more!"

Well, good point. Is this proof that labels are ripping us off? Not necessarily.

There are many other costs involved in getting music ready for vinyl. You can't just take the music files from decades ago and put them on vinyl. Sometimes they were mixed, mastered, and/or engineered poorly back in the day. Fixing any or all of those issues while also bringing them up to modern standards is expensive. Even with a sonically perfect album, the sound still has to be adjusted for the limitations of vinyl (CDs and digital files can reproduce the full sonic spectrum better than vinyl can). You really want to get someone that knows what they are doing to make these adjustments.

So needless to say, comparing prices between one label and another is pretty much pointless. One company may decide to put less music on each disc and fork over a lot more for a double issue, while another may choose to squeeze a bit more on one disc to meet the budget.

Oh, and then there is the artwork. Some companies pay to have the artwork re-created from scratch (either as new designs or "faithful to the original" versions), while others try to stretch out the original artwork to fit on the larger vinyl format. As someone that has made artwork for vinyl re-releases, this is no easy task either way. And if you aren't careful, you will end up with the pixelated fiasco that was the cover of the re-issue of Tourniquet's *Vanishing Lessons*:



"Okay, I get it," you say again, "it can all get expensive. So you just pass that cost on to the buyers, right? Surely it doesn't come out to \$30+ per disc like we are seeing now?"

Weeeelllll... here is where the real expose comes in. The vinyl re-issues we see from the labels and bands that Down The Line covers don't exactly... sell a whole lot of copies. Sorry, our "scene" is just not big enough to bring the prices down for most releases. Sure, there are anomalies like Starflyer 59 releases that sell huge numbers, but that seems to come from 5 fans that buy hundreds of copies a piece (or something like that). The real price break in manufacturing vinyl comes from buying releases in bulk, typically with 500 units being the first big price break. Some factories won't even go below 500 as minimum purchase, while others will go as low as 300. However, many of the releases you and I are interested in would be lucky to sell 100-200 copies. There are a couple of factories that will do runs that small, but if you know how bulk pricing works... it gets more and more expensive as the numbers get smaller.

Many of labels have to decide whether to see if they can pay for 500 records and hope to sell them at a high enough price point to break even after selling 200 copies, or to go higher in price for 200 copies and hope to sell most of them to again reach the break-even point.

But many don't. I have spoken with several bands and record companies about their vinyl re-issues behind the scenes. They rarely break even, and usually lose money on vinyl re-issues. Even at the prices they are charging.

And what about the bands? Well, if they still own the publishing rights to their music, they can usually charge a publishing fee. If not, that fee has to go to the company that currently holds those rights. It's a sad side of the business, but many bands didn't get paid for the music they put out on record labels back in the day. Some of the re-issue labels do work in some kind of payment for the bands. But on the other hand, often the band refuses to participate in the re-issue. You can't even force them to take money even if there is some to be given.

Then there is the tedious aspect of shipping the vinyl to the buyers. Vinyl is fragile. The record jackets are fragile. Shake them even a bit in shipping, and the jackets fold and crease. Sometimes you can fix this by shipping the record outside of the sleeve, but then collectors will complain that you removed the wrap and they can no claim the album as "still sealed."

A lot of the blame for this damage is often directed back to the record labels and/or bands, but the truth of the matter is that it is usually the post office that causes this damage.

Even minor creases in the jacket can be caused by bending the packaging. Those cardboard mailers have a good amount of bend in them that won't show up as visible damage on the package, but will crease the record jackets inside of them.

Of course, it's not always the post office. If a large number of people are seeing the same major damage to their package even though the records were sent all over the country, there is probably a problem at the shipping or manufacturing facilities. This was probably the case with the recent re-issue of Starflyer 59's *Gold* album, where hundreds of customers all over the nation had the same extreme crease marks on their jackets and inserts while there was no damage to the box at all. This is the rare case, though:



All of this to say that even packaging and shipping the vinyl can be a time consuming venture. I'm amazed that any labels even try it, to be honest. However, as someone that has bought a lot of vinyl as well, I know there are many companies that do their best to release quality products at the lowest possible price: the Limited Run family (Retroactive Records, Roxx Records, Girder Records, No Life Til Metal Records), Lo-Fidelity Records, Steadfast Records, Galaxy 21 Music, Old Bear Records, Latent Print Records, Velvet Blue Music, Burnt Toast Vinyl, Stunt Records, and others, as well as many of the bands we feature here, can all be trusted to put out quality vinyl releases at the best price possible:



A HISTORY OF CHEESY WRAPS

by Doug Peterson

Most of us have guilty pleasures. I am going to come clean with one of mine: Christian Rap. I have this insane affection for that subgenre. Early Christian rap was inspired by popular acts like Grandmaster Flash, Fat Boys, and Doug E. Fresh. Most of the rap I am covering here were what Howard and Streck coined as "Separational CCM," mainly concerned with evangelism and exhortation. (Check out chapter 2 of the book *Apostles of Rock* for a more detailed account.)

Rap got its mainstream start with The Sugarhill Gang, which placed in the Top 40 in 1979. However, Pete McSweet will tell you it began in the Garden of Eden, quite a bit earlier! McSweet is the man behind the first faith-based rap song, which came to us in 1982 with *The Gospel Beat 12"*. This one set the bar high: it had a lively choir, melodious keys, funky bass, a smooth jazz trumpet, and spectacular drumming/percussion. This 12" is worth obtaining, and can still be found on Discogs.

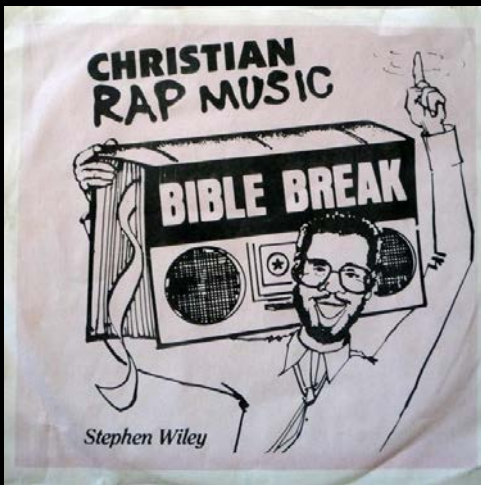
Before going any further, let me introduce to you the **Cheese Factor** number system, which I use to rate the cheesiness of these releases. I will rate them on a scale between 1 and 5, with 1 = the lowest on the cheese factor and 5 = the highest or the cheesiest. So McSweet's 12" gets a 2, only due to the reissue cover featuring a half-naked McSweet being tempted by a lady with an apple. A pure cheese cover.



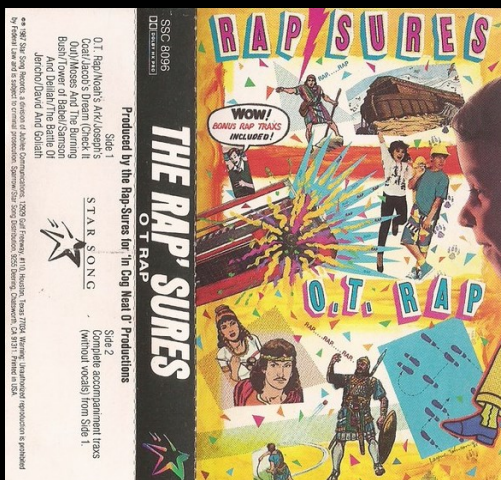
A couple years later Mr. T from *The A-Team* TV sitcom released a rap/electro funk album for kids, *Mr. T's Commandments*. This one was a fun album to give kids a moral compass rather than being a proselytizing tool. Mr. T has been outspoken about his faith and this album reminds kids it is cool to live a straight 'n' narrow lifestyle. Pity tha fool who can not enjoy this one! Cheese Factor: 5 (A true classic in the cheese rap category)



In 1985 Stephen Wiley put out *Bible Break*, the first full-length Christian rap album on a Christian label. What you may not know is that Wiley was a jazz drummer in 1979 and wrote a song called *Basketball* that rapper Kurtis Blow recorded. Wiley began writing Christian rap in 1982 but did not release *Bible Break* for another three years. *Bible Break* was about as cheesy as it gets. The first track names off all the books of the bible in chronological order to help the listener remember them. Wiley broke ground for Christian rap and released five albums after this debut. Cheese Factor: 5

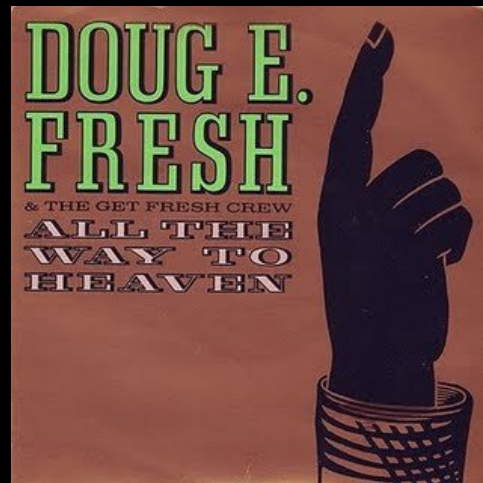


In the same year Terry Taylor, Doug Doyle and Rob Watson (aka Daniel Amos and Frontline Records) formed a Christian rap group called The Rap'Sures. *Gospel Rap* was the first Christian rap geared specifically for young kids. Terry Taylor explains it like this: "Well, there wasn't any (rap) on the Christian labels. We do a kids thing, we see it as appealing to 7 and 9 year olds. No one was doing it. We just brainstormed a little bit, Rob Watson and Doug Doyle and I, we were just looking for something to do, something to work on, we did it and then didn't think that much about it, and it was successful. Don't ask me why. We thought, no one will take this seriously, we're just doing it for kids, a little Bible story kind of thing. Megamouth was kind of the same thing. We looked at it that way." So here we have the first Christian rap albums that owns up to their own chessy-ness. They also put out *O.T. Rap* and *Loud Proud Born Again*. Cheese Factor: 5 (and fully deserved)

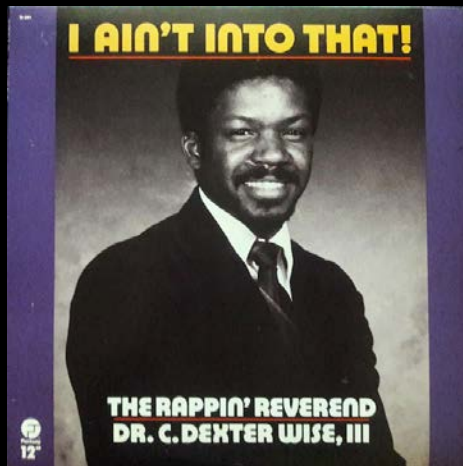


Megamouth was the other Terry Taylor-Rob Watson kids project, also featuring Dan Ruppel of comedy act Isaac Air Freight. Distributed by the Frontline Kids label, both *Rap Battle In The Big City* (1987) and *The Great Skateboard Adventure* (1988) were one part spoken word and one part rap. Both of these albums are also extremely hard to find but worth the search. Cheese Factor: 4

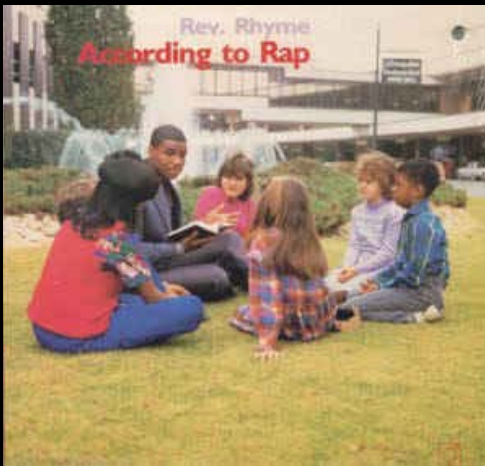
In 1986 the mainstream group Crew Devastation released four 12" records with gospel influence, the most popular one entitled *No Time To Lose*. During the same time Doug E. Fresh & The Get Fresh Crew released a rap 12" entitled *All The Way To Heaven* (Fresh is now a member of the Church of Scientology, by the way). Crew Devastation thought Doug E. Fresh's 12" sounded too much like *their* gospel rap so they dissed Doug E. Fresh with a another 12" called *We're All Going To Heaven*. The whole thing sounds silly, but that is what happened. These were quite legit rap releases with gospel content, so no Cheese Factor rating for these.



Also in 1986 The Rappin' Reverend aka Dr. C. Dexter Wise III released an excellent 12" entitled *I Ain't Into That*. The Rappin' Rev. was actually a child preacher at age 12. While making this record, he was finishing up a Harvard Graduate Degree. The rhyming on this one is simplistic. Still, I find this release charming by the fact he played all the keys and wrote/sang the songs himself. Cheese Factor: 3



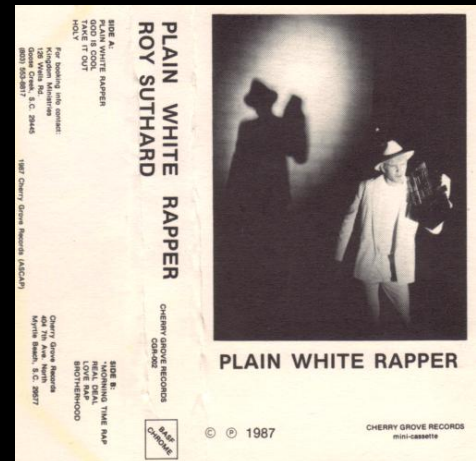
A year later Rev. Rhyme came out with a full length album called *According To Rap*. If ever there was a dude who could rap in polyester, this was your guy. You can definitely tell Rev. Rhyme was a preacher by the way he fit so many bible stories and theological observations into these eight songs. Musically, it was keyboard and a drum machine. Fun stuff. Cheese Factor: 5



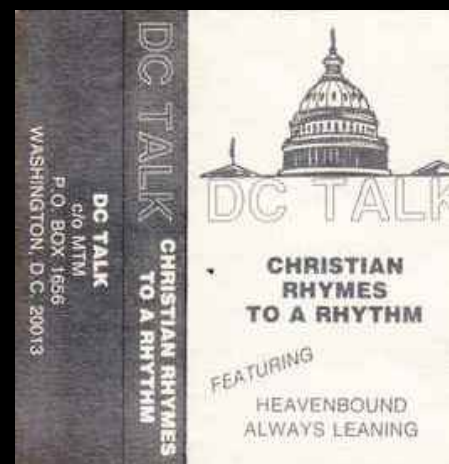
Another contender in 1987 was Michael Peace with *RRRock It Right*. Wikipedia acknowledges Michael Peace as the grandfather of Christian rap, though I beg to differ. Peace may have been early but righteous rap grand daddy he was not. Peace did give Christian rap more accessibility and was picked up by Reunion Records. His music was edgy and had cultural awareness. Before Peace did rap, he was a black student activist in Upstate New York. Cheese Factor: 3

Another early one is Roy Southard's *Plain White Wrapper* tape from 1987. This one featured keyboard with programmed drums. It also had an authentic monster bass sound. But the dude is hopelessly white,

as the title implies. Interesting to note is that in 2005, Christopher 'Razorsharp' Shick contemplated using the name Plain White Wrapper for his MC project, but decided to scrap it. Later on, Christian rapper KJ-52 did a song called "Plain White Rapper" featuring cowbell, but not related to this act at all. Cheese Factor: 3

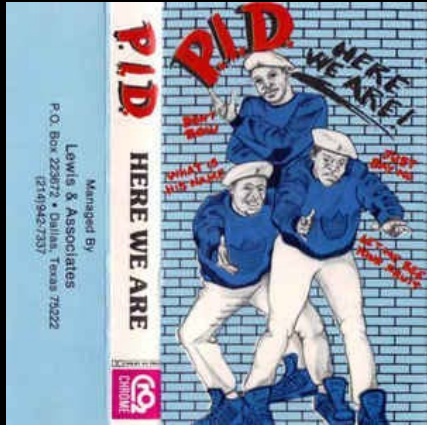


The year 1988 was quintessential for Christian rap. DC Talk (aka Descent Christian Talk) from Jerry Fallwell's Liberty University came in with a crazy awful tape. The opening keyboard notes on the first song "Heavenbound" are so bad that they are cringe-worthy! It was a bit pop and a bit rap. The Christian market needed a group to make rap more accessible, and DC Talk were there with bells on. It became the best selling Christian debut album, which says a lot about the market considering what a disaster this album was. This would be humble beginnings for what would become an extraordinarily talented group, selling two million records with *Jesus Freak* six years later. Nonetheless, "Heavenbound" was miles from being good. The tape was charming in a juvenile way. Cheese Factor: 5



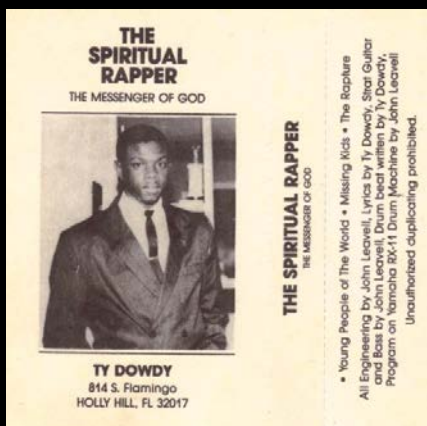
Then PID (aka Preachers In Disguise) launched *Here We Are*, which changed Christian rap forever. PID was the first Christian rap act to hit the Christian bookstores and get major recognition. Their rhymes were scandalously trite. Surprisingly, kids ate it up and parents were happy their kids were not listening to the secular crap. Check out this song if you need a reminder of how silly it was:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tYJ_dXw9MPE
Cheese Factor: 5



J.C. & The Boyz were a good example of a group so emboldened in their faith that they come across as faith pushers. Style-wise, they were current with the rap scene. Lyrically, they suffer from the same foot-in-mouth disease as PID and DC Talk. *Never Give Up* came out in 1989 on Broken Records. Cheese Factor: 4

Also back in 1989 or so, Ty Dowdy put out a lesser known indie tape, *The Spiritual Rapper*. This one was excellent musically, but lyrically, not so much. Three songs of righteous rap, short but sweet. If we are talking cheese, this one is like fondue, dipping into the cheese lightly. Cheese Factor: 2

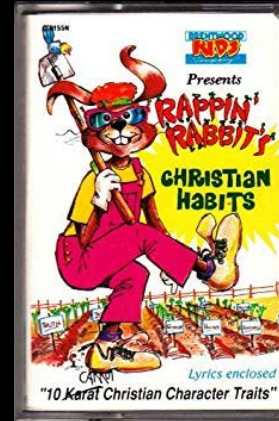


Then there is a tape from Rappin Rabbit from 1989. A white dude named Rhett Parrish is responsible for this piece of musical torture. Listen to it for yourself if you do not believe me:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9X6-Nid5cpk> or

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kppx4bzfAaE>

Cheese Factor: 6 (*I know, it only goes up to 5...*)



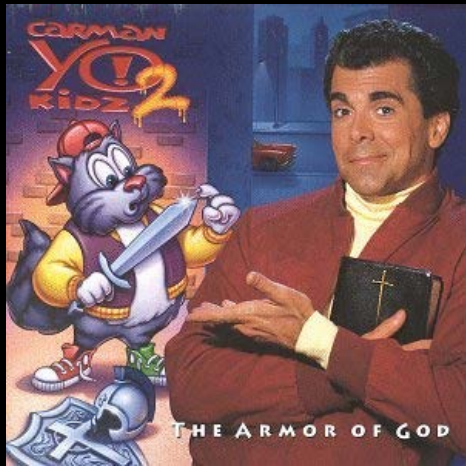
In 1990 MC Hammer released his second album *Please Hammer Don't Hurt Them*. Hammer would object to being classified as a Christian artist, though gospel music played a large part in his career. He was active in church, singing in a group called The Holy Ghost Boys. The song "Pray" became a hit in the pop industry, going #2 on the charts. I do not consider MC Hammer cheesy, though he was over-the-top pretentious in his early career.

Say What?, an electro-pop/rap group consisting of two white guys, Tricky Downbeat and Mix Master Mighty White, hit the market with a couple Star Song Records albums. Say What? sounded similar to Jazzy Jeff & The Fresh Prince and they wore their cheese very proudly. The album *Fresh Fish* came out in 1990 and featured a comedy song about Sandi Patty entitled "I Can Sing Higher." Their hidden-identity career went downhill from there. Cheese Factor: 4

Carman, CCM's answer to Gino Vannelli, entered the rap arena with gloves on, appealing to kids who needed some fresh bible rap. *Yo Kidz* (1992), *Yo Kidz 2* (1994), and *Lawrence And The B-Attitudes* (1994) were hot items with Word distribution. Video was also available so you could see the Italian stallion on screen. Hanson even sang on the David & Goliath track. Check it out:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6YmNCsBP4d4>

Cheese factor is an overwhelming 5.



If you think cheesy Christian rap is a thing of the past, here is one from 2006. It's Rev. DeWayne GoLightly aka Rev. Rap's *Rappin 4 Jesus*:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6L6w31MmJDs>

This featured track is a time-travel back to the days of the books of the bible memorization songs. Does the world really need one more of these? Cheese Factor: 5 (once again)



In the "What do ya do with this?" category I share with you a fake bad Christian rap piece: Check out:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t0NJGENMu7Q>

Here is the story. Pastor Jim Colerrick apparently put out "Rappin' For Jesus" around 2003 as a rap tool for the youth of his church, the West Dubuque 2nd Church of Christ. The church was said to have shut down in 2004. The rap that was made it to video featured the following line: *Jesus is my n*gg*r*. The entire video is made of tongue-in-cheek phrases, silly clichés, and hokey moves. It is a train wreck of a song that even the most sheltered church could not overlook. The other aspect that identified this video as a fake is that it used the word "swag." The word as used in current

popular culture was not popularized until 2010. This one does not deserve my cheese award.

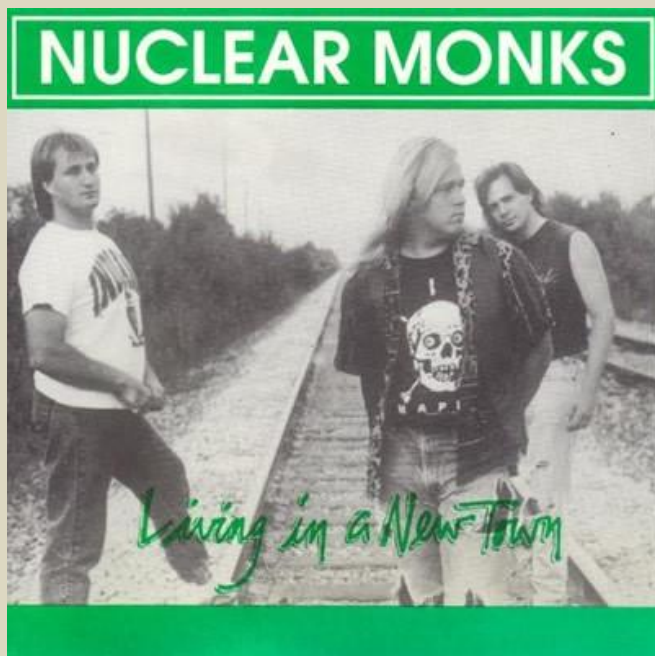


This immersion into the land of cheesy Christian rap also speaks to the fact that there were many talented and legit rap/hip hop acts as well. Some of the early rap stuff I thought were the real deal were D-Boy, SFC, ETW, DDC, Mike E & The G Rap Crew, Grits, and Gospel Gangstas. This, however, is not a fanfare to the good Christian rap that came out in the late 80s/early 90s. This is a celebration of the cheese that drivelled its way towards making Christian rap *grate* again. The cheese grater that gave us Christian rap also gave us a Sunday School message long after we left Sunday School. Maybe that is not the best comparison, and I do not want to belittle it all to simpleton Evangelicalism 101. But let's call it for what it was. A part of us might love it. A part of us might cringe. And you are like me, you will enjoy it for all the wrong reasons. Christian rap is a part of the larger story, how we came to understand our own narrative amidst this pastureland of culture and curdling. For this, we stand proud, turn the boom box up to 11 and rap it up for the J-Man!



Several years ago, a group of people set out to archive the fading world of the Christian Tape Underground. Building on the work of pioneers like Jeani Bond and Dan Kennedy, our goal was to catalog the various weird and wonderful recordings that most people had never heard of. We would digitize tapes, share copies of mp3s (to make sure there were plenty spread around the world), and somehow create an online data source for these efforts. When I became one of the people that was allowed to digitize and archive these treasures, the Christian Underground Encyclopedia was born.

We archive anything that was "underground" from the 80s or 90s - mostly tapes, but also vinyl and CDs. Stylistically, we cover everything from alternative to punk to rap to metal to industrial to experimental. There are two parts to this project: The [Underground Encyclopedia](#) itself and the [blog where I review the tapes as I digitize them](#). Every once in a while I find one that rises above the rest. So I decided to feature some in a column in the zine. So this month I bring you:



Nuclear Monks. Did they form a monastery in Chernobyl? Are they a new religious order in the world of Mad Max? It's an intriguing name for an even more interesting album.

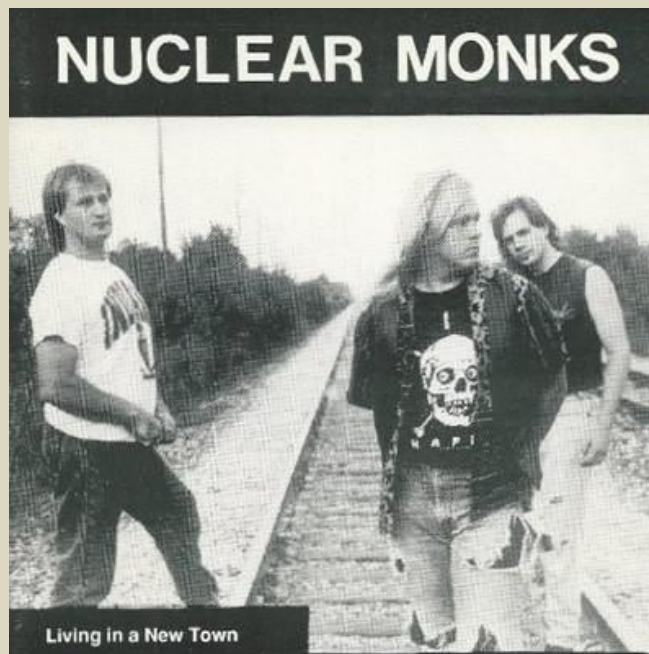
Originally I saw the tape of this on eBay, but after digging around, I found out that it was also released on CD (with two different covers). You can probably poke around for a copy as well. So since it sounds so interesting, I took a chance. I am glad I did. Nuclear Monks basically falls into the alternative rock / gothic rock tag. To be honest, they

could have easily fit in with Sincerely Paul, Black Carnation, and Tribe of Dan on the Blonde Vinyl Records label. There is a slight influence of *Sonic Temple*-era The Cult here and there, along with The Alarm as well.

As you move deeper into the CD, the harder rock influences from late-80s The Cult drop off, and the band starts sounding like a more alternative/goth mixture of The Stand, Brighton, The Cry, etc. But they don't stay there forever - when you get to the final song "Real," they come roaring back with their hard rock/alt/goth sound.

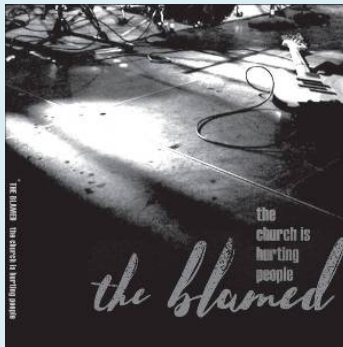
You can dig around a bit and find a few interesting tidbits about the band as well. The best one being a [live video on YouTube](#) when they opened up for the Newsboys and the Walter Eugenes. From the video, I can tell you the guy on the left in the cover shot is the guitarist Kenny Johnson, and he is wearing an Indiana shirt because that is where the band is from. The guy on the right is the lead vocalist and bass guitar player Scott Hudnall. He is also the primary songwriter. The guy in the middle is the drummer and background vocalist Mark Clark (interesting to note that Clark is wearing a Die Happy t-shirt that Roger Martinez of Vengeance Rising fame used to wear a lot).

All in all, this appears to be another alternative rock hidden treasure along the lines of October – should have been snatched up by some label, but never was it seems. I'm not sure what is up with the two different covers above other than being different editions – they seem to have the same release date and tracks on them otherwise.





The Ocean Blue | *Kings and Queens / Knaves and Thieves* | 2019 Korda Records | theoceanblue.com | While many thought that The Ocean Blue's 2013 comeback album *Ultramarine* was a one-off release, it seems the band had other plans in mind. It took them a good six years to get the next album out, but *Kings and Queens / Knaves and Thieves* proves that The Ocean Blue still has a lot of momentum to keep going into at least another decade of existence. The title track opens the album with that classic dreamy indie alt rock sound we all love, but with a noticeable touch of growth over their last album. The Ocean Blue are really masters at tapping into the past while reaching for the future. They know how to keep the fans of old happy, while adding something new for those that want growth as well. I see many people picking "Love Doesn't Make It Easy on Us" as a favorite track, and that is a great pick. It reminds you of the great days of Modern/College Rock while mixing in some modern shoegaze as well. "All the Way Blue" has all of the makings of a future The Ocean Blue classic. I love the way the slightly haunting piano mixes with the bass and electric guitars. Also love the interesting mix of playful and melancholy in "The Limit." I could give a play-by-play list of what I like about each song, but you should really check it out for yourself. You can find it on most digital/streaming services, as well as on CD and vinyl as well. I got the vinyl version and that really seems to be best medium for it if you ask me. (Matt Crosslin)



The Blamed | *The Church is Hurting People* | 2019 Indie Vision Music | theblamedband.com | I know The Blamed are back with their first full album in 17 years. The biggest question most people will have is what style will this be? Skate punk? Hardcore punk? Emo? The Blamed has moved through a wide range of styles. While I would say this emo-leaning hardcore punk, you still feel many of their other influences throughout the disc. Shouted gang vocals, angular break downs, metal pounding, punk attitude, and many other styles are thrown in the mix. But don't think this is a disjointed album - they manage to mix everything well enough to keep it a cohesive whole. The title of the album has you wondering if they are going to take a hard-hitting look at the problems within the church that many turn a blind eye to. The first spoken word track gets into some both-side-ism that doesn't really examine the very real power inequalities in our world today. It's great to say we are all the same, but it doesn't help to not acknowledge that different sides on various issues exist because of power dynamics. I can't find a copy of the lyrics, so I don't know which way they go. Hopefully they eschew the both side-ism that has generally protected the Church from any real critical examination. But no matter what the lyrics say, the music is a killer return to form of The Blamed. I can't wait for my vinyl copy to arrive! (Matt Crosslin)



Starflyer 59 | *Young in My Head* | 2019 Tooth & Nail Records | sf59.com | Wowzers! If you have not yet heard the new Starflyer album by now, I suggest you find YouTube and check out a couple cuts. It truly is a return to Jason Martin in his finest form. This one is as strong as Buckley's cough syrup. And it holds up to repeated listening.

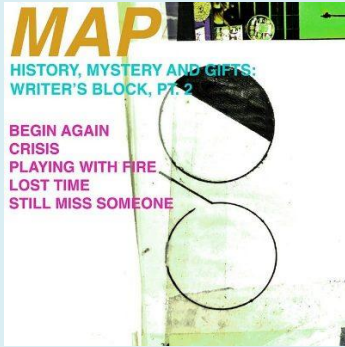
First thing you will notice with this album is the minimal artwork aka Ryan Clark of Demon Hunter. Yup, it fits well. Cowboy on a horse on the front, Joshua Tree-type design on the back. Heck, the album was even recorded in California.

Then you hold up that cd or vinyl, put it on, and are taken for a ride for the next 10 songs. There are no throw-away cuts. It holds up as a consistently as a lush recording, meshed with probing introspection. It's not complex at all ... guitar, bass, drums (his son plays them), keys (TW Walsh), and vocals. Interestingly, fans of SF59 have attempted to read into the lyrics like they are personal messages, even suggesting Martin might be retiring his music career. I hear the autobiographical nature of the lyrics but that is as far as I take it.

One thing I wish for with future SF59 albums (and I do hope there is!) is more variety in song compositions. The last two albums came at us with strength and consistency in the shoe-gaze rock format. It's hard to imagine them any other way. But I will hope the next project is a departure from this sound. Throw us a curve ball, Jason Martin, and we will be fine trying to make the catch. (Doug Peterson)



Stranger Kings | *Blue* | 2019 Northern Records | store.northernrecords.com | Nearly five years after gracing us with their debut *Red*, Strange Kings have returned with an even more impressive follow-up in *Blue*. The all-star line-up of Holly Nelson, Herb Grimaud, Brady Esquivel, and Campuzano bring the echoing, dreamy, driving alternative rock that we have come to know and love from them. The band describes their music as "Cali-gaze rock and post-punk bass," and that really fits their sound the best. If it sounds like they are going for a retro 80s approach, then the mention of *Sixteen Candles* and *Breakfast Club* on BandCamp confirm this. Starflyer 59 fans might also want to note that Jason Martin makes a guest appearance on lap steel in this album. The Lassie Foundation fans will note that this band was basically formed when that band broke up. Fans of good music should just take note, period. This one was unfortunately not released in vinyl like the last one was, but it sure would fit that format well. I find myself saying that a lot this issue. But you can still grab this one digitally or on CD. (Matt Crosslin)



MAP | *History, Mystery, and Gifts: Writer's Block, Pt. 2* | 2019 Velvet Blue Music | velvetbluemusic.com |

For those that missed it, this is the follow-up ep to 2017's *Hello Singularity: Writer's Block, Pt. 1*. Both releases are current digital-only eps that you can stream or buy at many of your favorite digital music outlets. If you have been a fan of MAP, this ep continues their development as a band into even tighter levels of awesomeness. For those that aren't already fans of the band, MAP is an alternative rock band that does the whole dreamy / melancholy modern rock sound very well. MAP front man Josh Dooley has been a member of bands like Pony Express, Starflyer 59, and Fine China. A mixture of those three bands is kind of a good starting reference for the sound here as well. The only problem is that this kind of music screams for the vinyl treatment, and it is not like MAP music has never been released on vinyl. I would even settle for a cassette release just to hear this kind of music in a more natural format for it. But for now, it looks like these will be digital only, and VBM indicates that CDBaby is the best place to get those digital files. (Matt Crosslin)

Title: 4 TRACK DIARIES

Track No.	Track Length	Contents
1	3:07	TENDENCIES
2	1:29	C - INSTRUMENTAL
3	1:14	AFTER ALL
4	2:49	SISTER BIG BOOBS
5	4:06	SIRENS
6	3:52	ONE OF THEM
7	3:17	INSIDE JOKES
8	3:52	I GUESS WE'RE ALL GONNA FIND OUT
9	1:39	I FEEL LIKE ONE OF THEM
10	3:41	WRITING FOR A CHANGE
11	3:38	I CAN DO IT
12	1:08	I DECIDED
13	2:02	SHAKE WITHOUT THE SHAKE DOWN
14	2:49	THE LITTLE POKIES
15	1:24	G.P. DIRTIES
16	3:32	G.RAVITY
17	2:09	WHAT THINGS ARE FOR
18	4:07	THOUGHTS AND SOUNDS
19	2:51	STOMACH
20	2:51	THINKING ABOUT YOU
21	2:11	GETTING CO
22	3:40	TWO DOTS TIMES
23	3:19	CHECK MY WAYS

Mike Indest | *4-Track Diaries* | 2019 Independent | mikeindest.bandcamp.com |

Returning to ancient times when a pair of Goliaths battled to control the vast expanses spread before them, these two behemoths named MySpace and Facebook, I discovered a four song EP on MySpace of intriguing electronica featuring a duo including male and female voices. I found it very compelling, and the lyrics very introspective without falling into an 'Emo' or 'Goth' impression. These four songs proved personally compelling, and I contacted their page. From this action, I met and conversed with Mike Indest, the songwriter, composer, and main singer of Motonaut. We developed a friendship as I continued to follow and appreciate his skills as a songwriter.

His latest release, *4 Track Diaries*, collects simple versions, perhaps early demos, of much of his material released elsewhere. This includes songs from the *Motonaut* EP in pared-down versions. The music is fun to hear in this context, and definitely pleasant to listen to, often entering sounds reminiscent of the MOOG development music of the late 60s through the 70s. Much food for thought, offering contemplation on struggles and brief-yet-satisfying glimpses of the divine.

1. "Tendencies" – a ukulele number examining the path of a woman until she finds, "everything she thinks her heart is looking for." A nice opening song, using a synth sound I fail to identify, yet I guess to be a KORG monotron. There's a bass drone utilized with this, as well as an instrumental solo.

2. "C-Instrumental" – Utilizing the aforementioned, unidentified synth instrument. A bright melody with an interest back-beat. The intriguing synth use continues throughout the record. The synth and ukulele continue throughout the album.

3. "After All" – Are there any answers, after all? Added tambourine.

4. "Sister Big Boobs" – This song is about an attractive church lady, distractingly endowed. It's an engaging and honest portrayal discussing the struggle between religious concentration and temptation (*editors note: the song never blames the woman for how she looks. Mike is too intelligent for that*). Mike Indest told me an interesting side note on this song. If I recollect the details well, it goes something like the following. While The 77s (or Michael Roe) were working on a GoFundMe (or some funding site) project, someone purchased the option for Mike Roe to sing any song. This song was requested, yet the recording never occurred or never found release. I, for one, would have enjoyed hearing the performance. Alas.

5. "Sirens" – One of the tracks found on the *Motonaut* EP. "I sing along with the sirens. As they lead me to destruction."

6. "One of Them" – "They flatter themselves in their eyes. And I feel like I'm one of them. Do you see me as a man after your heart? Or do you see me as one who cursed your name?" Examining cultural hypocrisy in the church, and self-examination.

7. "Inside Jokes" – A carnival feel to this tune, appropriate and likely intentional. Relationship of friends in a musical project reaching for success. "Staying up all night long. Listening to Art Bell and trying to write some songs." R.I.P. Art Bell.

8. "I Guess We're All Gonna Find Out" – "When you're stuck between the now and the not yet, does it all start to make sense?"

This being a 37-song album, descriptions of the first eight will hopefully compel the curious to check it out for themselves at the BandCamp site for Mike Indest, where much (all?) of his music is offered for free. Mike has much to offer with thought provoking lyrics and well-constructed music. (Kevin Noel Olson)



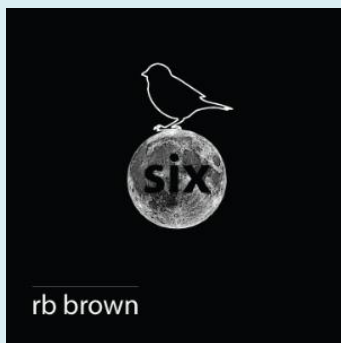
2Minute Minor | *Snake That Ate Its Own Tail* | 2019 ZAP Records | 2minuteminor.bigcartel.com | The old school punk banner is still waving strong on 2Minute Minor's new album. Or is it a double sided ep? You see, the first five songs were recorded with their old line-up, while the last 6 were recorded with a new line-up. That is also how they break up the two sides for the 7-inch vinyl. Yeah, this whole album fits on a 7-inch vinyl, so they are fast, short songs. Glad to see 2Minute Minor singing about love and unity among fellow humans – we need more of that. The song "Wesley Willis" is about a legendary figure in the Chicago music scene (NOT the lead singer of this band as I mistakenly thought at first) featuring an appearance by Omar "Bulldog" Higgins of Negro Terror. Omar has unfortunately passed away, but you should find his band's music and check them out. They are awesome as well. The last song – "Snake That Ate Its Own Tail" – is the one that seems dial in an old school punk / crossover sound the best. Maybe on purpose? Anyways, glad to see 2Minute Minor still going, and I hope we see more music from them in the future as well. (Matt Crosslin)



Secret Archives of the Vatican | *Barsoom* | 2019 Broken Drum Records | secretarchivesofthevatican.bandcamp.com | After spending 2018 releasing singles and an ep, I had expected Secret Archives of the Vatican to follow the same pattern this year... but they started the new year by teasing a full length album. They released that album in April. Their promo promises everything from "classic pulp science fiction" to "a mysterious Orient that never was" to "Middle Eastern culture" and all kinds of musical genres, and to be honest – that is exactly what they delivered and more. I wish I could find the words to convince you to at least check them out if you never have before. If you are looking for an album that sticks with one genre the whole time, then... well, why would anyone want that anymore? Even punk rock bands mix in other genres all the time. This album would be on whatever side of the spectrum would be from "one genre." Lots of mixing of various sounds from around the world, although I do feel the Middle Eastern culture a lot on this one. See "Cairo in the War" for example. For the most part, the beats seem to have a mid-pace feel to them, although songs like "Barsoom," "Citadel of Dust," and others are faster paced. Really cool cover art as well. So go give them a stream, add them to your playlists, and consider buying a download (name your own price) to support independent artists – especially ones like Secret Archives of the Vatican than have been going since the 1980s. (Matt Crosslin)



Sea of Orchids | *Washed Out Colors* | 2019 Independent | seaoforchids1.bandcamp.com | Sea of Orchids is a new band that evolved from The Distortion Mirrors, a band that long-time readers might remember was reviewed here way back in 2014. Well, now it is Luke Worle on his own doing "technicolored love letter to the 1980s." Oh, and did I forget to mention that Sony will release the next Sea of Orchids album called *Silvergirl* on September 6th? Pretty big deal. So anyways, what about the music you say? The sound really is a mixture of noise, dream pop, shoegaze, 80s nostalgia, and emotion like the promo blurbs online proclaim. You really kind of have to listen closely to appreciate the layers to the music – it's not so much guitar riff-based music as it is constructed levels that build from each other, like the way the bass and guitar play off of each other in "Evil, Inc." Of course, then the heavy 80s-new wave synth inspirations of "The Teardrop" come blasting through your earphones and you wish you had a boom box to play it on. But don't forget there is still the pop element – many songs like the title track "Washed Out Colors" are catchy and experimental and complex at the same time. So go check out this album for now and then their label debut in a couple of weeks. (Matt Crosslin)



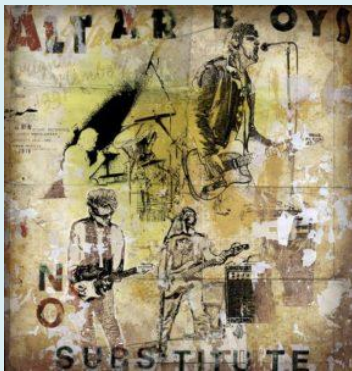
RB Brown | *Six* | 2019 Pop.Vox.Music | popvoxmusic.com/product/six/ | *Six* is a nine song album written and performed by RB Brown in 1997 but not released until 2019. RB Brown was a member of the Australian band The Crux, who changed names to Sal Paradise and released albums with Tooth & Nail Records and Velvet Blue Music. This album was apparently recorded in 1997 and then lost until Pop.Vox.Music was able to rescue it from obscurity and release it this year. The sound is an interesting mixture of moody, acoustic, indie, piano, drums, alternative, bass, harmonica, and a few other instruments mixed in. Overall the music is acoustic, but there are songs like "Six" and "Anywhere" that have a full band sound. Other songs like "Bus Trip to Melbourne" and "I Loved You Once" are acoustic guitar and harmonica or piano. but there are also piano-based tunes like "Those Red Mournful Lips" and "Late Afternoons in the Company of Mr. Cohen" (which is actually a simple but effective piano-only instrumental). Its a good mixture that keeps the album interesting from beginning to end. (Matt Crosslin)



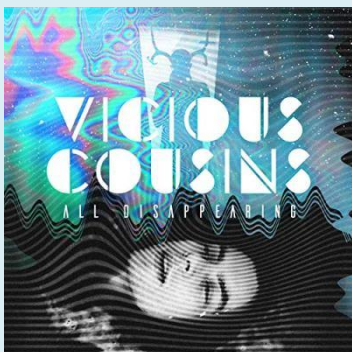
Prayer Flags | *Prayer Flags* | 2017 File 13 Records | file13records.bandcamp.com/album/prayer-flags | Well, we missed the boat on this one. We reported way back in January of 2014 that Mark Robertson of Legendary Shack Shakers / This Train / Under Midnight / Altar Boys / The Stand / etc fame had started a new “noisy poppy post punk” band called Prayer Flags. Well, in September 2017 they actually did release an album... and we missed it somehow. Argh. Turns out it is on BandCamp for you to listen to and purchase digital files, or grab a nice looking vinyl version (just got one myself, so I know they still have some). Sorry Mark! Noisy poppy post punk is a good place to start describing it. There are some electronic elements and samples, as well as some experimental parts and structures. Which all makes it sound a bit like a combination of Mark’s above mentioned bands... which it kind of is, but really isn’t. But I would say that if you like any of Mark’s work with any other bands, then check this out. (Matt Crosslin)



Good Saint Nathanael | *Hide No Truth* | 2019 Independent | goodsaintnathanael.bandcamp.com | Nate Allen of Destroy Nate Allen fame takes on a dark but redemptive journey through his past, present, and future with the debut album from his new project Good Saint Nathanael. I should warn you that “redemptive” is not used here in the form that many in evangelical church circles would recognize. This is redemption that is still in process, the kind that comes from opening up your life to honesty and baring of the soul in the same manner that the various writers of the Psalms that you never read in church did. Nate Allen uses terms like “dark folk,” “good sad songs,” “bummer slowcore,” and “trauma-informed” to describe the music on *Hide No Truth*. Those are good starting places – I would recommend listening to Nate’s recent interview on the Down the Line podcast for more information. The music and lyrics on this album are probably some of the most soul-baring you have heard in a while. If you have had any problems with institutional religion, you will recognize yourself in these songs. Musically, many of these songs are Nate singing over simple guitars – but there are other layers in other songs as well. “Heaven” has some electrified atmospheric guitars playing in the foreground, while the acoustic guitar is played in a way that provides a rhythm. You feel like you are listening to a slow rock song until you tune in and realize there are no drums. Other times, like in “Lightening,” the electric guitars provide ambiance in the background of the acoustic guitar. There are many other sonic nuances in various songs that I won’t spoil here, but all of this to say that this is not just an entire album of one dude and his guitar and that’s it. There are layers to the music just like there are layers to the lyrics. This album is releasing February 1, so I would recommend that you get ready and go grab it when it finally does get unleashed. Your inner demons will thank you for it. (Matt Crosslin)



Altar Boys | *No Substitute* | 2018 Lo-Fidelity Records | thealtarboys.bandcamp.com | Your eyes aren’t deceiving you – this is a new release from the Altar Boys... kind of. You see, for decades *No Substitute* was a rumored “lost” Altar Boys album. In an interview for Down the Line in 2009, Mike Stand confirmed those old rumors of an unreleased album to be true to some degree. The songs for the album had been recorded as demos, but the album was shelved when the Altar Boys called it a day. Some songs (in newer format) made it into the Clash of Symbols catalog. Then more recently there were Facebook postings about a cassette of said demos surfacing, and how the demos were near studio quality even. Then the band decided to dust off a couple of the demo songs for a documentary. Then silence. Finally, Lo-Fidelity announced out of nowhere that all of the songs would be finished (by adding a few missing full instrument tracks), cleaned up, and released. Miracles do happen in all kinds of ways. But the question is – what would these tracks sound like? I don’t have the demo versions to compare to, but the final tracks on the official release sound studio quality to me. Stylistically, I would say this continues well from *Forever Mercy* while still reaching back to some of the anthemic punk of *Gut Level Music*. A bit too melodic to be pure punk, but a bit too punk to be pure rock? I got my version on vinyl, but you can find various digital versions out there as well (CD, download, and streaming). The layout, sound, and packaging are all top notch. Great job by all involved in bringing this long lost album back from the beyond. This was initially funded by a Kickstarter, but you can get extra copies now (although I would suggest you make sure to snag a copy before they run out). (Matt Crosslin)



Vicious Cousins | *All Disappearing* | 2017 Chain Letter Collective | chainlettercollective.com | One day I suddenly wondered why I had not heard any new releases from Kissing Cousins in a while. I looked around and found out that sadly, they had broken up. However, Heather Heywood and Amanda Siara from Kissing Cousins did form a new band, and this ep is their first output. Described as “heavier and spacier” than Kissing Cousins, I would say all fans of their former band should check this out. The overall feel is experimental in nature, metal in instrumentation, punk in attitude, and doom in all the right places. This all comes together in “We Are Wolves” – one of my favorite tracks – but really, there is not a dud song on the whole ep. It seems like this was only released digitally, but a vinyl version would be sweet (if anyone out there is listening to me). I can’t really find any current information about this band online, so I don’t know if they are still active or not. It would be too bad if this was it. (Matt Crosslin)



Untitled by Rick McDonough